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28 May 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Implications of a Soviet Attempt to Make the Western Position in Berlin Untenable

1. Problem: (a) To assess the implications of a withdrawal of the Western Powers from Berlin under sustained Soviet pressure; (b) To assess the willingness of France and the UK to accept a serious risk of general war in order to maintain the Western position in Berlin.

2. Assumptions:

(a) That as a result of a Soviet and/or East German blockade of Berlin, the Western position can only be maintained by the threat or use of force, at least to the extent necessary to maintain access to Berlin;

(b) That no direct military attack by either Soviet or East German forces has been made against the Allied position in Berlin;

(c) That, apart from the Berlin situation, the world situation has not deteriorated to the point that general war appears imminent.

IMPLICATIONS OF A WESTERN WITHDRAWAL FROM BERLIN UNDER SUSTAINED SOVIET PRESSURE

3. General Consequences. In general, a Western withdrawal from Berlin under sustained Soviet pressure would result in: (a) a lowering of confidence among non-Communist states in the will and ability of the West, under US leadership, to resist Soviet pressures and encroachments; and (b) loss of hope in the European satellites and particularly in East Germany, of eventual liberation from the USSR.

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4. Consequences by areas.

a. Berlin. The Western sectors would be quickly subjected to communist authority, and the city itself would become the seat of a communist regime, which would claim to be the sole legal government of Germany.

b. West Germany. West German confidence that the West, and in particular the US, was willing and able to protect German interests, including West Germany itself, against sustained Soviet pressure would be shaken. We believe that this adverse reaction would result despite the probability that the West Germans would not wish to accept war, or even a grave risk of war, in order to preserve the Western position in Berlin.

c. NATO Powers. A withdrawal under sustained Soviet pressure would throw into question the readiness and willingness of the Western coalition, under US leadership, to resist Soviet pressures. Moreover, a surrender of Berlin would inevitably entail grave moral implications in Western Europe. In particular, the abandonment of the strongly anti-Communist West Berliners would be a serious blow to the moral position of the West.

d. On the Soviet bloc and East Germany. A Western withdrawal from Berlin under sustained Soviet pressure would be construed by the Communists as a major victory over the West and in particular over the US. A Western withdrawal would profoundly discourage the peoples of East Germany and the Satellites, to whom Berlin now stands as the strongest remaining symbol of the impermanence of the territorial arrangements made after World War II, and who would thus interpret a withdrawal of the West from Berlin to mean that they had been "written off" by the democracies.

e. Rest of the World. In general, the withdrawal would be interpreted by the rest of the world as proof of Soviet tenacity and determination, and as an indication of US unwillingness or inability to resist sustained Soviet pressure.

5. Long-range effects. A withdrawal from Berlin under sustained Soviet pressure would probably intensify the cold war. The US would fear that further accommodation would be interpreted as weakness, while the Kremlin would be encouraged to take further aggressive action against the West.

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WILLINGNESS OF FRANCE AND THE UK TO ACCEPT SERIOUS RISK OF
GENERAL WAR IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE WESTERN POSITION IN BERLIN

6. France and the UK would insist on exhausting the possibilities of negotiation to achieve a settlement of the blockade and would be extremely sensitive to any signs of US impatience or precipitancy.

Prime Minister
7. If it became obvious that the Western position in Berlin could only be maintained by the threat or use of force, we believe that the French would almost certainly be unwilling to incur a serious risk of war in order to maintain the Western position. We believe that Churchill would wish to take a firm position, but that he would have difficulty in winning sufficiently widespread British popular support. As a consequence, the British government might be reluctant to assume a serious risk of war.

8. If the US stated its determination to use measures involving the threat or use of force, we believe the British government would almost certainly give active support to these measures, and we believe the French government would probably give at least passive support.

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